To Remember Dovey

Circa 1977, Cornell University

Dovey Madeline Davis
Lovely, Lively, Creative Spirit
Dovey Madeline Davis had lived a full life by the time she was diagnosed as having Alzheimer’s Disease at the age of 50. Yet, her vitality and energy seemed to assure her longevity.

Dovey was our sister, aunt and grand-aunt. Her life brought so much joy to ours that we want people to know of her existence for generations to come. There will never be another Dovey. However, to remember her active, short and full life is to ensure that she will continue to inspire all who come in contact with her story.

She was born in Atlanta, Georgia to Madeline Smith Davis and Philip M. Davis, Sr. on October 27, 1928 in the William A. Harris Memorial Hospital on West Hunter Street, N.W. She was baptized by Reverend E. R. Carter at Atlanta’s historic Friendship Baptist Church. She grew up along with her two brothers, Philip M. Davis, Jr., and Griffith J. Davis, on Spelman College’s campus where their father worked as Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds.

After Philip, Sr.’s sudden death in 1939, her mother found work as a dormitory mother at Atlanta University. The school did
not allow her to keep Dovey with her. So, she sent her to stay with her sisters, Auntie Lora Cobb and Dovey Brooks in Birmingham, Alabama. Dovey’s oldest brother, Philip, was finishing Morehouse College while her other brother, Griffith, was soon entering the college dormitories.

Dovey graduated from the Graymont Public Elementary School in Birmingham, Alabama in May 1941. She went on to attend Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, North Carolina until graduating on June 2, 1946. Her yearbook described her as “Miss Senior”, “Most Amusing”, “Class Optimist”, and “Most Talented”. She bequeathed to a junior classmate “her ability to get along with people.” These were some of the traits Dovey carried throughout her life.

Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown, PMI’s President, wrote the following to Dovey’s mother on May 22, 1946: “You sent me a wonderful little girl, and I think I am returning to you a fine little lady. You did a job that many parents have failed to do and we didn’t have to do much to keep her going in the right direction.”

Dovey received a B.A. degree in Home Economics from Howard University in 1950. Her schoolmates crowned her their 1949 “Miss Howard”. She was one of 24 Howardites to be listed in the 1949-50 edition of “Who’s Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges”.

She graduated from New York University on October 26, 1953 with a M.A. degree in Home Economics in Education. As a graduation gift from her brother, Griffith, she sailed on a Dutch freighter to Liberia to visit his family and to see a bit of the outside world before she “settled down to the work world”.

Her visit to Liberia opened a whole new world to her. She quickly fell in love with the country and the people. Liberia became her adopted home for 23 years. She married two Liberians: Joseph Walker in 1954 and Emmett Harmon in 1957. She raised numerous stepchildren, including Emmett Harmon, Jr., and travelled to over 23 countries around the world.
From 1956 to 1966, she was proprietor of Dovey’s Cards and Pipes Shop in Monrovia, Liberia. It was an import and export business featuring merchandise from Europe, the Middle and Far East and the United States.

As a volunteer effort between 1965 and 1967, Dovey was curator of the non-profit, Gallery I, in Monrovia. This gallery exhibited and sold the artwork of both expatriate and Liberian artists.

From 1966 to 1968, she broadcast a daily half-hour segment of “African Panorama” over the Voice of America shortwave radio of the United States Information Agency. From 1968 to 1971, she served as Special Assistant to the country’s First Lady, Mrs. Antoinette Tubman. She was Mrs. Tubman’s liaison to over one thousand members of the local Social Services Association; the forerunner of a full Ministry of Human Welfare.

Dovey was very generous to her family and friends. She and her husband, Emmett, frequently sent trans-Atlantic plane tickets to friends in the United States and Europe to come visit them in Liberia, particularly at the times of the gala Presidential inaugurations. When they visited New York to attend the United Nations General Assembly meetings and other occasions, they invited close friends throughout the U.S. to join them for diplomatic receptions in their Waldorf Towers suite.

Upon President William V. S. Tubman’s death in 1971, Dovey returned to the United States to become a 1977 doctoral candidate in Community Service Education at Cornell University’s College of Human Ecology. As an offshoot of her doctoral program, she conducted a country survey on “The Role of Home Economics in Family Planning: Liberia” that was published in 1972 under an Agency for International Development grant to the American Home Economics Association. She also attended the famous Bogue summer workshop at the Community and Family Study Center of The University of
Twenty-four students at Howard University will be listed in the 1949-50 edition of "Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges," it was revealed last week by Dr. Armour J. Blackburn, dean of students.

"From the standpoint of both scholarship and extra-curricular activities, the young men and women selected for this honor are the most outstanding students at the university," Dean Blackburn stated.

The "Who's Who" book, which contains biographies of outstanding students in universities and colleges throughout the country, is sent to important businessmen and organizations as an aid in the placement of college graduates in industry.

STUDENTS NAMED
The following junior and senior students were elected for inclusion in "Who's Who":


"FORTIETH IN '50."
Chicago on world population problems. After completing her coursework in Ithaca, New York, she spent the entire year of 1976 conducting field research in Liberia on “The Role of Women Farmers as a Potential Human Resource in the Rural Development in Liberia: Lofa County”.

Her intense interest in the role of women led her to become a member of the National Council of Negro Women’s delegation to the 1975 International Women’s Year World Conference and Tribune in Mexico City, the first of its kind sponsored by the United Nations. This was only one of a variety of conferences in which she was active.

However, her doctoral dissertation was never completed. In 1978, neurologists, double-checked by specialists at the National Institutes of Health, determined that she was afflicted with the incurable Alzheimer’s disease.

Dovey was forced to retire to Washington, D.C., at the age of 50, to live with her brother Griffith. She subsequently entered personal care and nursing homes as her physical and mental condition declined from year to year.

Dovey had friends from all walks of life and from around the world. She belonged to many organizations during her lifetime,

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1949 — “Miss Howard” steps through giant football at Coronation Ball for crowning.
Dovey travelled to 23 countries for business and social purposes
- Denmark
- France
- Germany
- Ghana
- Greece
- Holland
- Israel - 10th Anniversary
- Italy
- Ivory Coast
- Libya
- Liberia
- Mexico
- Morocco
- Nigeria
- Senegal
- Sierra Leone
- Spain
- Switzerland
- The Azores
- The Canary Islands
- The Gambia
- Tunisia
- United Kingdom

including: the Order of the Eastern Star, Ruth Chapter 3, Sinoe County, Liberia; the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, charter member of Zonta International; Corresponding Secretary of the Washington, D.C. Chapter of the American Home Economics Association, Board Member of the Family Planning Association of Liberia, Cornell Association for Adult and Extension Educators, the World Population Society, and, in 1973, Vice President of the African Students Association at Cornell University. This last affiliation shows how intertwined Dovey's life had become with Africa and Africans.

To know and love Dovey was to know and love her family and friends. Here is what they have to say about her:

"She loved people and people loved her. When she entered a room, it lit up with her radiance and personality. I feel terribly sad about Dovey's condition and hope and pray that God will give her the tolerance to cope with such devastating neurophysical state of helplessness. I cherish my own memory of her as a lovely and lively person, full of creative energy and sensitive spirit and I am also proud to remain one of her close friends and human companions."

(From a tribute to Dovey by Lattee Fahm, UN Official, who had known her in Liberia and the United States for more than 35 years.)

"I like the epitaph you have planned for Dovey. It described her perfectly. Each time I see her I think of what she used to say when she was going out to have some fun. She would always say that when she got old and was sitting in the rocker, smiling, she knows the children would wonder
1954 and 1957 — Dovey married twice in Liberia to Joseph Walker and Emmett Harmon.

what old granny is smiling about. It was for those memories that she was going out to have some fun. Life is so uncertain. One must stay ready and live each day to the fullest.” (From a letter to Dovey’s family from her friend, Ruth Phillips).

"These are the friends who attended our 1990 class reunion (of the 475 who graduated in 1950). Of the 113 that attended, 61 reunioners knew Dovey well.” (From Dovey’s classmate, Hylde Purce, who attended the Howard University Class of 1950 Reunion.)

Emmett and Dovey lead the Grand March at Monrovia.

1961 — Dovey stood as Matron of Honor at wedding of her friends Mervell Winzer and Pohlman Bracewell, Jr. The President of Liberia, William V. S. Tubman and Chief Justice Chesson officiated.
The following comments are from her niece, Dorothy.

"Dovey generated excitement wherever she went. It didn't matter whether her audience was old or young, strong or frail, poor or rich.

"She had a passion for life that was infectious to all. Her laughter pierced a room, no matter how empty or full of people it might have been. Her personality was like a magnet that drew people to her from around the world. Everyone knew that Dovey was a fun-loving person.

"Dovey was as unusual as her name. She always wanted to be dressed in the latest fashions or wear beautiful, but distinctive jewelry, or smell of the best fragrances of France or drive a sports car (like her pink Mustang) or be able to dance the latest dance or enjoy the latest music fad of the young. Dovey was always young in spirit ... and did everything with flair.

"She believed in living life to its fullest everyday; almost as though she could not count on tomorrow. For this reason she was a risk taker and an independent thinker. She started her one business in Liberia, Dovey's Gift Shop. She travelled the world to get exactly the items she wanted for her shop. Her life in Liberia and her travels to different parts of the world made her become aware of the social problems of people, particularly, rural women in Africa.

"She was a person who believed in people and loved them for who they were. Even though Alzheimer's Disease eventually robbed her of her past and future, she fought it each step of the way until she could fight it no more. In the early stages, as her sentences became incomplete, she would communicate through her personality. A certain lift of her eyebrow or look from her eyes or twitching of her mouth let you know just how she felt. For, all of these facial expressions, were a part of Dovey's repertoire of communication. She could invoke laughter just with the turn of her brow.

"Dovey was and continues to be an inspiration to all of us. We hope that those who hear about or read her story will also be inspired. To Dovey, we want to say that we love you and miss you. May you now rest in peace."

There will never be another Dovey. Her active life was short, full and an inspiration to all who came in contact with her. R.I.P.
1975 — Dovey visited Mexico City with the delegation of the National Council of Negro Women and participated in the International Women's Year World Conference and Tribune (June 18 - July 2, 1975). She is shown in official conference photograph with Dr. Dorothy Height, NCNW National President and Ms. Ruth Sykes, NCNW Special Assistant.

Grand Bassa County, Liberia — As assistant to President’s wife, Dovey, with local officials, dedicate new water pump installed as rural development project.

Friday, June 27, 1975
6:00 P.M.
NCNW International Seminar Education and Training for new roles in development — what is being done?
Panel of International Delegates
Dovey Davis, Discussion Leader

Dovey Davis of Cornell University, opened the discussion on the topic "Education and Training in New Roles for Women," by referring to the provisions of the World Plan of Action related to the use of education as a tool for social change in developing nations are at present facing urgent and pressing social and economic problems that demand solutions for the very survival and well-being of their country-persons. Such problems include lack of formal as well as nonformal education, unemployment, underemployment, mass poverty and hunger.
DOVEY’S LAST PROJECT — 1976

“Liberia was selected because of the special interest generated by twenty-three years of living in that country. The investigator had the opportunity to travel into the interior as a special assistant to the late president’s wife. During these frequent visits on presidential councils to the rural area, the investigator noted first hand the many problems of the women farmers. At the request of the president for the discussion of the needs, interests and problems of their developing country, these rural women were very vocal in expressing their inadequacies, attitudes, interests and needs as related to the improvement of themselves and their families. When the opportunity came for the investigation to pursue an advanced degree, the author was encouraged by the Liberian government to identify the constraints of the rural women in their special rural development programs and possibly to make some recommendations for maximizing participation in rural development through home economic allied programs.”

1976 — Dovey spent the entire year in remote rural Lofa County of Liberia conducting research for her doctoral dissertation. She visited many village health clinics like the one shown above.


Dovey was a 1977 doctoral candidate in Community Service Education, College of Human Ecology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. She interviewed hundreds of rural women such as these crowded in a village health clinic with their children.

Photographs by Brenda Humphrey

VOINJAMA — Residents of villages in northwest Liberia build schools and clinics as part of county-wide self improvement program studied by Dovey in 1976.

WOZI — Remote villages of Lofa County were reached by Dovey in 4-wheel drive vehicle and by foot. Research was required for Cornell University degree.

1946 — Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown bestows High School diploma upon Dovey at Palmer Memorial Institute.

**SURVIVORS**

Two Brothers:
Philip M. Davis, Jr. and wife, Eloise, of Detroit
Griffith J. Davis and wife, Estella, of Atlanta and Appling

Two Nieces:
Phyllis C. Davis of Sacramento
Dorothy M. Davis-Joseph and husband, William, of Morristown, New Jersey

One Nephew:
Benjamin G. Davis and wife, Christina, of Paris, France

Four Grandnieces:
Beatrice Davis of Sacramento
Josette Davis of Sacramento
Anne-Laure Davis of Paris, France
Joelle Jihan Joseph of Morristown, New Jersey

Great-Grandniece:
Tagen Anastasia Davis of Sacramento

Stepson:
Emmett Harmon, Jr. and wife, Cecily, of Wilmington and Monrovia, Liberia

**INTERMENT**

The Davis Family cemetery plot, Dovey’s final resting place, is located across the road from the Lincoln Memorial Cemetery Chapel in Atlanta.
Circa 1965 — Studio portrait study of Dovey M. Davis taken by Manning Studio, New York.

1968-1971 — Dovey in her Executive Mansion Office in Monrovia, Liberia.
Arrangements:
Sellers Brothers Funeral Homes, Inc.
889 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, NW
Atlanta, GA 30314
and
Robert G. Mason Funeral Home, Inc.
Washington, DC

Choral Music in the Lincoln Memorial Cemetery Chapel
was recorded by the Saint Luke’s Episcopal Church Choir,
Washington, DC
The "Solo for Bride's Aunt Dovey Madeline Davis" was a solo executed by a Ghanaian drummer named Emmanuel Quao all dressed in an elegant Kente cloth the traditional dress of that West African country. Dovey lived in West Africa for approximately 20 years so her niece thought this was appropriate for her wedding. It was a moving tribute.

Presidential Woods Health Care Center Quarterly, 1988

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Dovey's extended family thanks you for your prayers and concern for her particularly over the last decade or so as her dynamic self faded imperceptibly right before our eyes.

Some of you visited her at Mrs. Esther Jefferson’s Personal Care Home in Capitol Heights, MD and later at the Presidential Woods Nursing Home in Adelphi, MD. Dovey had the best of care throughout her final afflicted journey. We can at least be thankful that she was comfortable during her last helpless years on earth.

If you wish to express some final tribute to Dovey please leave a flower on her grave in Atlanta when you visit there. You may also make a donation of Hope to the AD Research program, c/o Alzheimer’s Association of Greater Washington, 7970-C Old Georgetown Road, Bethesda, MD 20814 in her name.

The Davis Family
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